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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 1542nd MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Monday, 28 October 1996, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. EL-SHAFEI
(Vice-Chairman)

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In the absence of Mr. Aguilar Urbina, Mr. El-Shafei, Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 40 OF THE COVENANT (agenda item 4) (continued)

Initial report of Gabon (continued) (CCPR/C/31/Add.4)

1. At the invitation of the Chairman, the members of the delegation of Gabon took places at the Committee table.

2. The CHAIRMAN invited the Committee to continue its consideration of the initial report of Gabon (CCPR/C/31/Add.4).

3. Mr. MOUYAMA (Gabon), having thanked the members of the Committee for the constructive interest they had shown in his country's belated initial report, said that Gabon was wholeheartedly committed to the principles enshrined in the Covenant and would do its utmost to meet its reporting obligations under article 40. His delegation had noted the criticisms of the initial report and all other pertinent comments and hoped that, with the assistance and cooperation of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the quality of future reports could be greatly improved.

4. Several speakers had remarked that the Covenant's non-discrimination provisions were not fully reflected in the Gabonese Constitution. While taking note of that criticism, he felt that the second paragraph of article 2 of the Constitution, succinct as it was, covered most of the essential points.

5. Replying to questions relating to equality between the sexes, an issue on which the report should perhaps have been more explicit, he said that boys and girls in Gabon enjoyed equal opportunities up to the age of puberty. Thereafter, no doubt as a result of inadequate sexual education, young Gabonese women tended to become pregnant far too early and to drop out of school, with the result that, by the age of 20 to 25, the young men were generally well ahead.

6. Gabonese parents could not be said to marry their children at too early an age; it was more a matter of biological rhythms and the hazards of co-education. Contraception was not prohibited in Gabon, but information on modern methods was relatively slow to spread, although awareness of contraceptive methods was on the rise among Gabonese women. The Government intended to take steps, with the help of organizations such as UNICEF and WHO, to impress upon the young the importance of avoiding excessively early motherhood.

7. According to UNICEF figures, there had been 211,556 registered elementary school pupils in Gabon in 1992, about half of them girls. In 1993, the school attendance rate for 14 to 16 year-olds had been 91.4 per cent among boys and 86.7 per cent among girls. The literacy rate was slightly higher among women (69 per cent) than among men (55.7 per cent).

8. Gabonese marriage law was modelled on French civil law. Because of the separation between church and State, only civil marriage was recognized for legal purposes. There was no discrimination against women in marriage whatever their religion. In the event of separation or divorce, the initiative for which could emanate from either spouse, children under five years of age were generally left in the custody of the mother, while custody of children over the age of five was granted to the spouse better able to exercise the right of parental authority, that concept having replaced "paternal authority" in the revised Civil Code.

9. So far as equality at work was concerned, women enjoyed equal rights under the Labour Code and received the same wages as men. The length of regular maternity leave was 15 weeks, and a mother wishing to extend that period in order to nurse her baby could not be dismissed from her job. It should be noted that agriculture in Gabon was traditionally in the hands of women.

10. With regard to inheritance rights, it had to be admitted that traditional customs were hard to eradicate. Under the law, a legitimate spouse whose husband predeceased her was normally entitled to inherit his house and property, but in practice the husband's family often objected to that arrangement. The Government intended to improve the protection of widows under the new Social Security Code. Although dowries had been abolished by the Government in 1961, the practice still lingered in places.

11. Replying to questions as to whether non-discrimination was confined to Gabonese citizens, he said that Gabon had a large number of resident foreigners, both immigrants and refugees. No one in Gabon was deprived of the right of free movement within the country. Foreign workers had to carry a special card and were required to pay a certain sum in exchange for a temporary exit authorization. The former measure had been introduced in an attempt to regulate the employment situation and the latter was designed to stop departing foreigners from leaving large debts behind them.

12. Gabon's geographical situation made it impossible to prevent illegal immigrants from entering the country almost daily. The unfortunate incident involving the death of 67 persons referred to at the previous meeting had occurred because the security forces had arrested more people than could be accommodated in the available police barracks. An inquiry into the incident had been held with the participation of representatives of the victims' countries of origin and an interministerial commission - on which the Ministry of Human Rights was represented - had been set up to advise the military authorities in charge of rounding-up operations.

13. The problem of illegal entry did not arise in the case of refugees, 790,000 of whom were currently living in Gabon. Refoulement was completely unknown. The authorities provided refugees with provisional papers enabling them to move freely within the country pending the issuance of a UNHCR card. Even those not recognized to be refugees by UNHCR were allowed to remain in Gabon and, where possible, to be joined by their wives and children. Many found work in the country and some became students.

14. Before inviting a representative of the Ministry of Justice to answer questions relating to the independence of the judiciary, he wished to make it clear that all references to "the Constitution" were to the Constitution of 26 March 1991 and the elections referred to were those of 1990.

15. Mr. RAZINGUE (Gabon) said that the President of the Republic, being the guarantor of the nation's independence, stood above the three powers (judiciary, executive and administrative) and presided over the Supreme Council of Justice, which governed the country's judicial authorities. That did not mean, however, that he intervened in the day-to-day administration of justice. It should be noted that, under the revised Constitution, the Office of the President was no longer linked to the executive.

16. Replying to questions concerning the death penalty, he said that the criminal code provided for the death penalty in cases of murder, parricide, poisoning and homicide for the purpose of cannibalism. The death penalty for crimes such as treason, espionage, organizing or directing rebel groups, plotting against the State, etc., although still on the statute books, was no longer in force.

17. Mr. MOUYAMA (Gabon), replying to a question concerning the status of judges, said that future judges in Gabon studied at the College of Magistrates or the Law Faculty of the National University. After a legal career similar to that in other countries, they were appointed to the bench and retired at the age of 65. Replying to questions concerning delays in judicial proceedings, he said that, although the need for speedy action was recognized, there might be some danger of injustice if proceedings were too rapid. Steps were being taken to minimize the length of pre-trial detention.

18. Mr. REZINGUE (Gabon) said that the Supreme Council of Justice ruled on disciplinary and other matters relating to the careers of members of the judiciary. When acting in that capacity, it was presided over not by the President of the Republic but by the President of the Judicial Court.

19. Act No. 9 of 31 December 1983 specified the duration of pre-trial detention. In the case of correctional offences, the initial maximum period of six months could be extended by two further periods of six months by order of the examining magistrate and, subsequently, the indictment division. The maximum period of pre-trial detention for such offences was thus 18 months. In the case of serious offences, the examining magistrate and, subsequently, the indictment division could extend the initial one-year period of pre-trial detention to a maximum of 24 months.

20. Article 35 of the Code of Criminal Procedure stipulated that, in places that were easily accessible to a representative of the Government Prccurator's Department or a judge of minor jurisdiction, the maximum period of police custody was 48 hours. In isolated areas where arrested persons could not immediately be brought before a magistrate, that period could be extended to a maximum of eight days. In cases of in flagrante delicto arrest, the period of police custody could also be extended to eight days by a decision of the Government Procurator.

21. Mr. MOUYAMA (Gabon) said that all accused persons had the right to be assisted by a lawyer of their choice or to have legal assistance assigned to them. Family visits were permitted at all stages of detention and imprisonment and a prison doctor was on hand for medical consultations.

22. Libreville Central Prison was the main penitentiary with two smaller prisons in Port-Gentil and Franceville. For short-term detention and police custody, there were local prisons and police and gendarmerie stations.

23. Police officers were currently under the authority of the Ministry of Defence and received both military and police training. After the 1993 elections, the Government and opposition parties had agreed, inter alia, to place the police force under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of the Interior in order to restore its civilian status. Legislation to that effect was expected in 1997. Although the judicial police was responsible for investigating crime under the authority of the Ministry of Justice, it nevertheless still came under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Defence.

24. According to the timetable established at the Paris negotiations, elections to a new National Assembly should have been held in May/June 1996 And the Constitutional Court had dissolved Parliament at about that time. However, the elections had been delayed in order to guard against a repetition of the alleged irregularities which had led to challenging the results of the legislative elections of 1990 and the presidential election of 1993.

25. Under the 1991 Political Parties Act, a party must have at least 3,000 members in all 5 provinces to ensure representativeness. There were currently 20 legalized political parties which were all entitled to receive government subsidies. Mergers and alliances were encouraged to promote the formation of more credible and representative parties.

26. There were no downtrodden minority groups in Gabon whose rights under article 27 of the Covenant were infringed.

27. With regard to the status of the Covenant, the fact that its provisions were not fully reflected in the new Constitution did not mean that the Covenant was held in low esteem but rather that the drafting had, perhaps, been too hasty. No individual had yet invoked the Covenant before the courts. A major public-information exercise was certainly required to promote awareness of the rights recognized therein.

28. The role of the Constitutional Court was to ensure that all enactments were in conformity with the Constitution. The National Communication Council was a body that regulated the use of the media. For example, it ensured that time slots for party political broadcasts on radio and television were shared out equitably among the parties. It also intervened in cases where the press or the audiovisual media were considered to have violated their professional codes.

29. Child labour in Gabon was most common among immigrants, who sent their children to work instead of school. The authorities had drawn the attention of the diplomatic and community representatives concerned to such practices.

The less frequently encountered phenomenon of Gabonese children performing menial tasks in the street instead of attending school was largely due to rural depopulation and the chaotic growth of Libreville.

30. Mr. EMBINGA (Gabon) said that the police force had originally been transferred to the Ministry of Defence to improve training and ensure a comparable career profile to that of the armed forces. In addition to joint training with the armed forces, the police attended police academies and schools for police inspectors and commissioners. The judicial police was basically answerable to the Government Procurator's Office and the Ministry of Defence had a purely administrative role.

31. Mr. NDJOYE (Gabon) said that a course in international humanitarian law for the Gabonese armed forces was currently being held with the support of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Every other year since 1979, officers had been selected to attend the Institute of International Humanitarian Law at San Remo, Italy. Such a background was particularly useful when members of the armed forces were called upon to assist the police and gendarmerie in restoring public order, as provided for by Decree No. 129 of 18 May 1962.

32. Mr. MOUYAMA (Gabon) said that the role of the High Court of Justice was to conduct judicial proceedings against politicians, other than the President of the Republic, for dereliction of duty.

33. The National Human Rights Comm'ssion was entirely independent of the public authorities.

34. Mrs. CHANET inquired about the existence of administrative detention unrelated to judicial proceedings.

35. Being familiar with the institution of the Supreme Council of Justice, she was not surprised to hear that it was chaired by the President of the Republic who was a guarantor of the independence of the judiciary. It was essential, however, that the Council should be a representative institution and article 71 of the Constitution referred only to members who formed part of the legislature. She would like to know who the other members were and how they were chosen.

36. She was not shocked either to read, in article 79, that the President of the Republic, unlike government ministers, was not tried for crimes and offences under ordinary law before the High Court of Justice. He was, however, tried by the Court for breach of oath or for high treason, as stated in article 78. She was puzzled, on the other hand, to read at the end of that article that "any interested person" could refer a matter to the High Court. She wondered if that meant that any Gabonese citizen could challenge the President of the Republic on the grounds mentioned in the article.

37. She inquired about the type of proceedings conducted before the State Security Court, which was a military court.

38. Mr. BHAGWATI asked, with respect to the High Court of Justice responsible for trying politicians guilty of dereliction of duty in the

discharge of their functions, who the judges were, whether any cases had been brought, and if so, of what kind and what the result had been. With regard to the independence of the judiciary, he asked how the judges in the various courts were appointed and how they could be removed.

39. He asked whether the new law on refugees had been drawn up, was before Parliament or had been enacted. He also wished to know what definition of refugee would be used - that of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees or that employed by the Organization of African Unity - and what the procedure would be for determining refugee status.

40. He asked if the guarantee under article 15 of the Covenant had been specifically included in the Gabonese Constitution or law. Finally, he would like to know which were the fundamental rights that could be derogated from during a state of emergency, and to what extent.

41. Mrs. EVATT said that the report provided little information on the rights guaranteed by articles 3 and 23 of the Covenant, and more specifically about the status of women in marriage. Her copy of the Civil Code of Gabon might, perhaps, be out of date, as she asked whether the provisions contained therein discriminating against married women with respect to such matters as headship of the family, obedience to the husband, choice of residence and right to travel were still in force, or had been revised.

42. Mr. EAZINGUE (Gabon) said that all forms of detention were governed by the instruments already mentioned except police custody. To the best of his knowledge, there was no administrative detention at the judicial level in Gabon.

43. Mr. EMBINGA (Gabon) said that police custody was always of a judicial nature. The only form of administrative detention of which he was aware was that which occurred when a foreigner arrived at the country's border without the documents required for entry. He was then held at the border until transport could be arranged to take him back to his country of origin, the country from which he had arrived or the destination of his choice.

44. Mr. MOUYAMA (Gabon) said that the Supreme Council of Justice was the only institution in Gabon which, in the event of conflict, was protected by the Constitution. He would leave a copy of the relevant act with the Committee, but the members of the Supreme Council of Justice comprised, in addition to the President of the Republic, the Presidents and Procurators-General of the Judicial Court, Administrative Court and Court of Audit, the Secretary-General of the Chancellery of the Ministry of Justice, the Inspector-General of Legal Services, the Presidents and Procurators-General of the Courts of Appeal, the Government Procurator, three deputies and two Senators as well as the Minister of Finance to identify the financial implications of promotions. The Supreme Council of Justice decided whether judges should be promoted. There was no election of judges, who rose in the hierarchy according to their experience.

45. The State Security Court no longer existed; it had been abolished at the time of the transition from one-party rule to democracy.

46. During the war in Biafra, Gabon had received a very large number of refugees, mostly young children. They had previously been the responsibility of a unit located in the Office of the President, but responsibility had gradually been transferred to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Minister for Foreign Affairs had recently submitted a statute on refugees in the Gabonese Republic which was awaiting adoption by Parliament. With regard to the definition of refugees, Gabon was trying to use both the definition contained in the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and that contained in the directives of the Organization of African Unity.

47. The only freedom that the state of emergency or siege suppressed was that of movement during the night curfew. Such a state had been declared in the oil region of Gabon in 1990, but no property had been requisitioned; it had been administered entirely by law-enforcement personnel and had been financed from the State budget.

48. As for equality within marriage, the Civil Code stated that a wife must obey her husband and Gabonese custom required that a man protect his wife. Obedience did not go so far, however, as to require that a wife obtain her husband's permission to leave the country; that had once been the case, but it was no longer so.

49. Although his country sometimes lacked method and technical skills, it was doing its best to implement the provisions of the Covenant. The very rapid developments of the past six years, associated with the democratic process, had entailed a great deal of legislative work. The Committee's suggestions had been extremely useful and would be passed on to his Government.

50. The CHAIRMAN invited the delegation to respond to the questions in Part II of the list of issues (CCPR/C/58/L/GAB/3).

51. Mr. MOUYAMA (Gabon) said, in reply to question a, that procedures in civil cases did not lead to imprisonment but, in the event of non-compliance with a judicial decision, there could be an enforcement by committal. If a person had been condemned for a petty crime and failed to comply with the order of the tribunal within the specified time period and after receiving several notices of default, he could find himself in prison. The procedure was laid down in articles 600 and 601 of the Code of Civil Procedure.

52. Replying to question b, he said that information on the rights recognized in the Covenant was disseminated in a number of ways. There was, however, widespread illiteracy in Gabon, and the Government had, with the help of UNDP, launched a programme to increase public awareness of human rights and also of disease prevention and family-planning methods. A special radio station was being launched to broadcast programmes on those subjects. Documentation was also publicly available. Copies of the report had not been provided to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) before being submitted to the Committee, but a press release had been produced stating that Gabon was submitting its initial report.

53. Turning to question c, he said that, during the state of emergency that had been declared in part of the national territory in June 1990 to put an end

to rioting there, individuals had been protected by the law-enforcement agencies and had recourse to the courts. The state of emergency had been declared by the National Assembly, which had specified both its duration and the terms of its implementation, non-derogable provisions being protected.

54. The requisition of people and goods, referred to in question d, was undertaken by judicial warrant in the event of a natural disaster. Individuals were required to respond to any requisition addressed to them in good order, and the law stipulated financial compensation on a daily basis and at a level appropriate to the property made available. The Government had hitherto had no need to use the provision.

55. With respect to question e, legal aid was available in Gabon to anyone who needed it. The relevant provision was to be found in article 50 of the Code of Civil Procedure.

56. As for question f on freedom of movement, people were free to move anywhere within the national territory without any specific formalities being required other than proof of identity. An exist visa was simply an authorization to leave the national territory of Gabon.

57. The right to privacy (question g) was guaranteed by the Constitution. Any limitations, for example in the event of a judicial investigation, required a judicial warrant.

58. Freedom of religion (question h) was also guaranteed by the Constitution, and all religions could be practised freely. There were no religious practices in Gabon likely to lead to abuses.

59. Freedom of expression (question i) was also guaranteed by the Constitution. Before 1990, there had been only one national newspaper but there were currently several, as well as two private television stations and a dozen private radio stations. The National Communication Council was responsible for ensuring that the media did not engage in defamation, public injury or incitement of hatred, especially in pre-election periods.

60. Protection of the family and marriage (question j) was guaranteed by the Constitution. Early or forced marriage was prohibited by law, and the law guaranteed the right of a foreign woman marrying a Gabonese man to choose her own nationality. The mother's parental responsibility was recognized like that of the father. Her succession rights were guaranteed, and she had equal rights with her husband to request a divorce. A child born out of wedlock had the same rights as a child born within wedlock; birth outside wedlock was legitimized by subsequent marriage.

61. Political rights (question k) had been guaranteed since the introduction of the multi-party system in 1990. No one was prevented by the law from engaging in political activities. Everyone had the right to join or leave a political party at any time. The former practice of National Assembly deputies changing parties after the election had been outlawed and such persons had to submit themselves for re-election.

62. Gabon was fortunate in having no problem with minorities (question 1). In its democratic procedures, it frequently opted for decisions by consensus.

63. Lord COLVILLE said that the Gabonese delegation's acknowledgment of the defects in the country's human rights performance indicated a clear intention of improvement.

64. The answer to question a of part II of the list of issues agreed with paragraph 36 of the report that a person subject to civil proceedings on grounds of debt could be sent to prison. That was, however, a most fruitless course of action since it deprived the individual of all hope of ever paying the debt and article 11 of the Covenant wisely prohibited imprisonment merely on the ground of inability to fulfil a contractual obligation. The Government of Gabon should think seriously about finding ways other than imprisonment for dealing with debtors.

65. The delegation had explained that the exit visa, or authorization to leave the country had been introduced in the 1970s, when individuals had been defaulting on payments for petroleum resources. In view of the guarantee of freedom to leave any country set out in article 12, paragraph 2, of the Covenant, the Government could, perhaps, devise an alternative means of ensuring that people settled their debts before leaving the country, or that they paid their outstanding debts after going abroad. Reciprocal conventions with other countries to ensure the enforcement of foreign debts was one such means.

66. Article 82 of the Constitution referred to other courts of special jurisdiction established on a temporary (non-permanent) basis. He asked for information about the nature of such courts, when they were set up, and how they operated. An example of a situation giving rise to the need for such a court would be useful.

67. Article 26 of the Constitution stated that the President could pass an ordinance in some circumstances. For what purposes? Was there any control over the constitutionality of such ordinances - by the Constitutional Court, for example? What remedy was available to individuals who were adversely affected by an ordinance that was subsequently deemed to be unconstitutional?

68. One real problem in Gabon was the dissemination of information about human rights; as admitted by paragraph 25 of the Core Document (HRI/CORE/1/Add.65). Human rights were exercised by human beings, who must be informed about their rights. He wished to know, therefore, what the Government was doing to publicize the various human rights, as well as modalities for their enjoyment and arrangements for their enforcement, including the exercise the Committee was currently engaged in.

69. Mrs. MEDINA QUIROGA said she agreed that Gabon must seriously consider amending its legislation to bring it into line with article 11 of the Covenant.

70. Paragraph 42 of the report, relating to article 14 of the Covenant, merely indicated that the examining magistrate was authorized to charge individuals, whereas article 14 stipulated that an individual had the right to be informed about the charges against him.

71. She would appreciate clarification of the reference in paragraph 44 to a period of eight hours for the preparation of a defence, which seemed totally inadequate.

72. As she understood it, article 50 of the Code of Civil Procedure provided for the designation of ex officio legal counsel. She wondered why it was the Code of Civil Procedure, rather than the Code of Criminal Procedure, that did so.

73. Paragraph 47 of the report stated that the judge must summon all persons whose testimony appeared likely to help elicit the truth. That was not the same as the right set forth in article 14 of the Covenant whereby the defendant was entitled to examine or subpoena the witnesses of his choice.

74. Paragraph 49 referred to "morally endangered minors", and she would like more information on the procedures applicable to them, and to juvenile delinquents in general. She would also like to hear the answer to Mr. Kretzmer's earlier question about the age of criminal responsibility under the law.

75. She wished to know whether there were any exceptions to the right to have a conviction reviewed by a higher tribunal (para. 50), whether different review procedures were applicable to offences of differing gravity, and whether there were any military courts in Gabon. If such courts existed, what jurisdiction did they have and were they under the supervision of the Supreme Court?

76. The delegation had indicated that children legitimized by subsequent marriage did not all have exactly the same rights and she requested further information on that point.

77. Mrs. EVATT said that the Committee needed information on how legislation regulated the right to freedom of movement, whether it provided for any restrictions and, if so, on what grounds. In connection with article 17 of the Covenant, the Committee needed to know how articles 5 and 6 of the Constitution were implemented in legislation and in what circumstances and by whose authority interference with the right to privacy was possible.

78. The information provided in paragraph 57 was very meagre and she wanted to know whether there was any censorship of any of the media in Gabon, how the broadcast media were regulated and what type of self-expression gave rise to criminal or civil liability under the law.

79. Information had been given about the regulation of political parties, but not about trade unions. How many were there? Were there any restrictions, and if so, of what nature, on the formation of trade unions and the right to strike? Were there different rules for trade unions in the

public and private sectors? She had received information indicating that arrests had been made in connection with strikes - how were such matters regulated?

80. Finally, she asked what the Government was doing about the school drop-out rate among young women owing to pregnancy, whether it was linked to restrictions on access to contraception and family-planning advice and whether such restrictions were still in place.

81. Mr. KLEIN said he had been interested to hear that there were no problems in connection with minorities in Gabon. Paragraph 5 of the report did indicate, however, that the Gabonese State was composed of different peoples. If that were so, then there must be a distinguishable majority and, consequently, one or more minorities. He would like more details on the subject.

82. French was the official language of Gabon, but there must be native languages also and he asked what their status was, whether people could communicate freely in them and whether they could be used in the courts.

83. Lastly, he would like to know what the procedure was for the dissolution of trade unions, whether those procedures were outlined in legislation, and what remedies or protection were available against such action.

84. Mr. FRANCIS asked whether the Government was contemplating any legislative measures to govern the creation of political parties.

85. Mr. ANDO said he endorsed the questions already asked about freedom of movement and particularly the right of non-Gabonese citizens to leave and re-enter the country. It appeared that there were virtually no restrictions on freedom of expression, but he would like to know whether there was any regulation to control the sale and publication of obscene pictures and whether people were entirely free to criticize the Government.

86. Paragraph 57 of the report indicated that the special status of media professionals was on the agenda of the National Assembly. Was that still true? If not, what had been the outcome of the National Assembly's consideration of the issue?

87. He agreed that further information was needed on the procedures for formation, registration and dissolution of trade unions. Were there any restrictions on assembly in public places - was prior notification or authorization required, for example?

88. Paragraph 69 of the report was unsatisfactory. As Mr. Klein had pointed out, paragraph 5 of the report indicated that various peoples coexisted in Gabon. Moreover, paragraph 68 stated that any regionalist propaganda was punishable by law, which pointed to the existence of separatist movements or groups. He would thus like some factual information on minorities and their political, economic and social status and whether any programmes were being implemented for their benefit. In particular, it would be interesting to learn if the Covenant had been translated into all the languages used in Gabon.

89. Mr. BHAGWATI said he agreed with Lord Colville's concern about compliance with article 11 of the Covenant. Paragraph 36 of the report spoke of "a certain period of non-payment" that could result in imprisonment, a measure which seemed to be unusually harsh and to run counter to article 11.

90. Was trade union unity the norm in Gabon, or were there a number of different trade unions? Was it permissible under the law for more than one trade union to operate in a given industry? Was there a law of censorship and if so, what were its main provisions regarding the media? Was there any equivalent in Gabon of the legislation which, in many countries, made it an offence to disclose official secrets? Was there any legislative provision on contempt of court? Was there any legislation to punish defection from a political party and did the defector have to seek re-election under the auspices of a new political party?

91. Paragraph 62 of the report indicated that freedom of association could be restricted by law. Consequently, he would like to know what restrictions were imposed by law and what was the nature of such laws. Details of any steps being taken by the Government to shore up the weak sector represented by dissemination of information on human rights and of human rights instruments would also be welcome.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.